

CHAPTER XII

THE SYMBOL OF CREATION

'They entered an apartment containing nothing except a black painting representing a woman. Her legs reached to the top of one of the walls; her body occupied the entire ceiling; from her navel hung suspended, by a thread, an enormous egg; and the remainder of her body, her head downward, descended the other wall, to the level of the pavement, where her finger ends touched.'—SALAMMBO.

THE late William Burges built for himself a house strange and barbarously splendid: none more than he could be minutely intimate with the thought of old art, or more saturated with a passion for colour, sheen, and mystery. Here were silver and jade, onyx and malachite, bronze and ivory, jewelled casements, rock crystal orbs, marble inlaid with precious metals; lustre, iridescence and colour everywhere; vermilion and black, gold and emerald; everywhere device and symbolism, and a fusion of Eastern feeling with his style.

In his own bedroom the bed and other furniture is vermilion heightened by crimson glazes. Over the mantle a syren combs her long gilt hair, looking-glass in hand—the mirror no make-believe. The ceiling has red beams crossing a black field studded with small convex mirrors, two inches across, surrounded by gilt rays, the mirrors giving back the candle-light like stars

in the midnight sky. The hangings are Eastern embroidery, and the pictures Persian miniatures. The ceiling of the next room is even more extraordinary and mysterious; it is divided into four squares by heavy beams, at the middle point of which there is a convex mirror as large as the moon: each of these squares is crossed by diagonal ribs of bright flamingo red, and a circle is drawn around the points of intersection, from which hang emus' eggs—four in all—large, almond-shaped, and matchless green. They vibrate as you enter the room.

Burges had been to Constantinople, and there a few years ago hung from the dome of Sta. Sophia, 'the fairest and noblest church in the world,' a light frame of iron, an octagon, perhaps some sixty feet across, with radii and inner concentric lines; a vast spider's web, suspended, it must have seemed—such is the immensity—from the very vault of heaven. On this frame were artlessly hung an infinity of lamps, tiny glass vases of oil with floating wicks. Here and again amongst them were suspended ostrich eggs, all placed with no more precision than the lights and oranges on a Christmas tree—long, short, straight and awry, and so near the floor as to be almost under the sight of the reader of the 'perspicuous book,' as he ascended the high pulpit of the conquered mosque with the law and a naked sabre, the alternatives of Islam.

It appears from photographs that vulgar gas lights have now taken the place of the original lamp frame, but it is shown in the interior view given in Texier and Pullan's book. These hanging eggs seem of universal use in the East, alike in church, mosque, and tomb. Still at Constantinople, the frames of lights in the mosque of Achmet are decorated with globes of crystal and ostrich eggs. They are usually stained in bright colours, and have small metal mounts at top and

bottom, with a pendant or tassel below. Such a frame carrying lamps and eggs may be seen in the wonderful water colour by Lewis at South Kensington.

The drawings of interiors of Arab mosques in Eber's 'Egypt' show, in a number of instances, a long cord, an egg, and then the lamp. Sometimes as many as a dozen are thus suspended here and there, or in a row from a beam. As far up the Nile as Assouan, Miss Edwards describes a mosque as 'cool and clean and spacious, the floor being covered with matting, and some scores of ostrich eggs depending from the ceiling.' In the Coptic churches the custom is equally observed, as may be seen in Butler's 'Coptic Churches of Egypt, from which the following extract is taken; and it is interesting to note how such a seemingly trivial circumstance as the hanging of an egg from the ceiling arrests the attention, and invites inquiry as to the intention of it:—

'The ostrich egg is a curious but common ornament in the religious buildings of the Copts, the Greeks, and the Muslims alike. It may be seen in the ancient church of the Greek convent in Kasr-ash Shammah, and in most of the mosques in Cairo, mounted in a metal frame, and hung by a single wire from the roof. In the churches it usually hangs before the altar screen; but at Abu-s-Sifain, an ostrich egg is suspended also from the point of the arches of the baldakyn. Here and there it is placed above a lamp, threaded by the suspending cord, as in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem; and sometimes it hangs from a wooden arm fastened on to the pillars of the nave, as in the Nestorian church of At-Tahara, in Mosul. Sometimes, instead of the egg of the ostrich, artificial eggs of beautiful Damascus porcelain, coloured with designs in blue or purple,

were employed, but these have almost entirely disappeared; in the churches of the two Cairos there is, I believe, not one left; but a few still remain in the churches of Upper Egypt, and in the mosques. The tomb mosque of Kait Bey, without the walls of Cairo, contains some fine specimens. These porcelain eggs are considerably smaller than an ostrich egg, but larger than a hen's egg. In the British Museum there is a porcelain egg from Abyssinia, with cherubim rudely painted under the glaze. It clearly belonged once to a Christian place of worship. The "Griffin's egg" was a common ornament in our own mediæval churches. In the inventory of 1383 A.D., no less than nine are mentioned as belonging to Durham Cathedral; and Pennant speaks of two as still remaining in 1780. . . . From the fact that marble eggs are said to have been discovered in some early martyrs' tombs at Rome, and that in all Christian lands eggs are associated with Easter-time, some think that the egg was regarded as emblematic of the Resurrection.' Another explanation was given to the author here quoted, by the Copts themselves. An ostrich is proverbially vigilant, therefore the egg becomes a type of watchfulness. 'This explanation seems rational,' he adds, 'for the devotion of the ostrich to its brood is, I believe, in accordance with the facts of natural history, and the use of the egg may well have arisen in Africa, where the habits of the bird are better known. At any rate, it is the best solution of the question.'

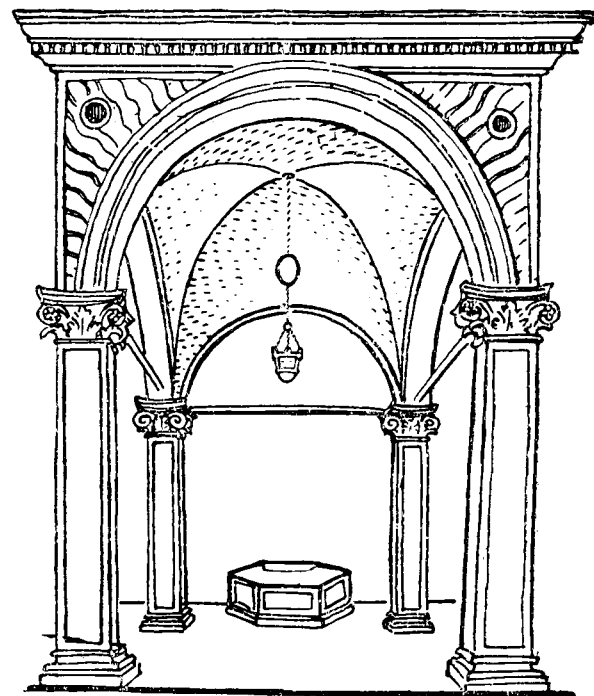
From the conclusion we must dissent, for the custom is universal, and of ancient origin, handed down from a time before Christianity, and all evidence points to the former explanation being the true one—resurrection, or rather, life. The egg is the typical germ, and therefore the natural symbol of creation. That the

Copts may see in it a symbol of vigilance we need not at all dispute, nor even contend that it is now used with definite symbolical meaning. For centuries—millenniums—they have been suspended from the ceilings of temples and tombs, and may now be accepted in many instances as merely ornamental trappings, but even thus accounted of good and sacred omen, from the importance of the points from which they are suspended; for not only are they hung in sacred buildings, but in places of honour and of ritual importance. In the churches in Athens numbers of ostrich eggs hang before the pictures of the Iconastasis.

The 'Griffin's eggs' were not necessarily ostrich eggs; in one instance they are described as having a brown and hairy exterior, the inside white, with a clear liquid yelk. We can buy them now for fourpence, as cocoa-nuts.

In portraits of Eastern kings an egg is sometimes shown suspended from the centre of the tester of the throne, and this is quite a traditional observance, which we find followed in Italian art; unless, indeed, a crown is suspended there, like that Benjamin of Tudela saw at Constantinople, glittering with jewels. Something pendant and freely swinging there must be to satisfy the Eastern taste; a means of beauty to which we rarely resort except for lamps, which have had to give way to the rigid pipe of gas. Cardinals' hats hang with splendid effect from the dim height of the vaults of foreign cathedrals, drooping and faded from age. But of all these things, a large jewel swinging from a cord would be the most mysterious and magnificent, like that over the Great Mogul's Peacock throne, as seen by Tavernier: 'When the king sets himself upon the throne, there is a transparent jewel

with a diamond appendant of eighty or ninety carats, encompassed with rubies and emeralds, so hung that it is always in his eye.' Another pendant was a green parrot in one emerald. Suspended votive crowns were frequent in earlier days. Constantine is said to have devoted his to the sepulchre of our Lord; and in England, Canute dedicated his to Winchester. In the



Cluny Museum are several of these crowns; a treasure-trove at Toledo. They are of about the eighth century, and there are hardly now in the world objects more strangely fascinating, with their pendant strings of jewels—circlets of blazing splendour, in barbaric gold. In a former chapter we have seen that these insignia and orbs were suspended from the

ceilings in Persia and in Assyria. We meet, too, in several places with a tradition of suspended chains of gold—in the porch of the Temple of Herod, in India, and in Scandinavia.

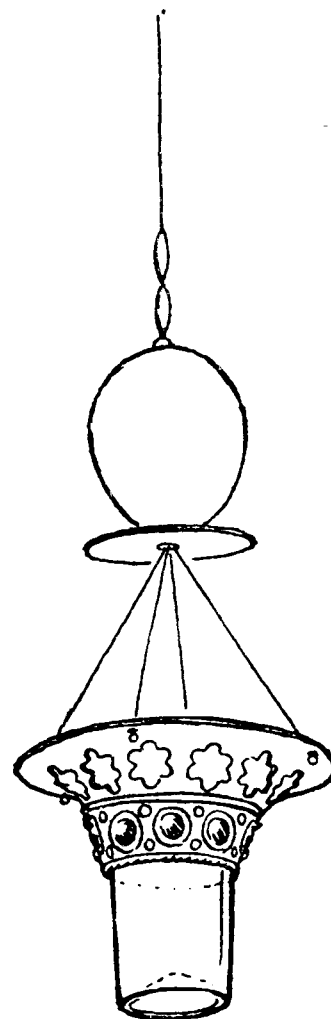
Pendant ostrich eggs are found in festoons at Jerusalem and at Mount Athos, and may be seen in the west at Toledo and Marseilles. In India, Miss Gordon Cumming saw ostrich eggs suspended from the gorgeous canopy of one of the great tombs of Delhi. At Tunis, they continue to be brought to the tombs, where they are suspended as *ex votos*. The Moorish mosques and tombs in Algiers are crowded with them, and at Kirwan, the holy city inland, they are hung over the tomb of 'The Companion,' with gilded balls of earth from Mecca. At Damascus, Lady Burton describes the tomb of St John as 'hung over with lamps and ostrich eggs; these latter are the ornaments of all holy places, and are supposed to bring good fortune.' It is the same over the tomb of the holy Hasan and his brother. Enough has been said to show that the practice of hanging these eggs is, or was recently, followed in Europe, Asia, and Africa, by all Christians—Catholic, Greek, Coptic, Nestorian, Abyssinian, Armenian; and by all Mohammedans in Turkey, Persia, India, Syria, Egypt, and Algeria. Let us follow up the tradition historically.

In a picture of the fifteenth century, in the National Gallery, by Marco Marziale, he shows an apse designed after that in St Mark's, Venice, and intended for part of the interior of the Temple. From the centre of this apse hangs a beautiful lamp, threaded on the cord of which is an ostrich egg, directly over the Christ. A picture of Mantegna's has a similar lamp (*see* next page). Hung over the tomb, as we have seen in several instances, or as here, over our Lord, they are

emblems of resurrection, and it is in this sense that they are so universally used in the early spring as

'Easter eggs,' not only in London and Paris, but widely over the world. Walcott's 'Dictionary of Archæology' says: 'The egg was the symbol of creation in Egypt, and of hope and the resurrection among the early Christians; the custom of giving coloured pasch eggs on Easter morning is found in the East, in the Tyrol, in Russia, in Greece, and many parts of England, where it may be traced back to the time of Edward I., and was observed at Gray's Inn in the reign of Elizabeth. In France, the pasch egg is eaten before any other nourishment on Easter day. Paul II. issued a form of benediction of eggs for England, Scotland, and Ireland; Henry VIII. received a paschal egg in a case of silver filagree from the Pope.' And an interesting point follows: 'De Moleon says that at Angers, on Easter day, two chaplains, standing behind the altar, addressed two cubiculars or corbeliers,

as they advanced, "Whom seek ye?" and to the reply, "Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified," answered,



"He is risen; He is not here." Then those who personated the Maries took from the altar two ostrich eggs wrapped in silk, and descended singing, "Alleluia, the Lord is risen."

In the account of Muscovy in 1567, in Hakluyt, it is told how the people prepared eggs against Easter, dyed red with basil, 'and gentlemen and gentlewomen have eggs gilded, which they carry in like manner. They use it, as they say, for a great love, and in token of the resurrection, whereof they rejoice; for when two friends meet during the Easter holidays they come and take one another by the hand; the one of them saith: 'The Lord or Christ is risen;' the other answereth: 'It is so, of a truth,' and then they kiss and exchange their eggs (both men and women), continuing in kissing for days together.' Waterton tells us that where he was at school, in the North of England, they had pasch eggs dyed purple on Easter morning.

The custom of hanging an egg from a dome appears in the story of the lamp, where Aladdin is made to ask for the roc's egg itself to adorn his palace. It was a roc's egg that Sinbad saw, half buried in the sands of Serindib, like a dome fifty feet in diameter. The story of the roc is linked to that of other immense mythical birds. In Japan the appearance of a vast bird is accounted, with earthquake and flood, as one of the 'seven calamities.' 'The Garuda of the Hindus, the Simurgh of the old Persians, the Angka of the Arabs, the Bar-Yuchre of the Rabbinical legends, the Gryps of the Greeks, were probably all versions of the same original fable' (Col. Yule's 'Marco Polo'). Then there are *Amru* and *Chamru* of the Avesta, which, like the eagle of the Norse and the phoenix of the 'Romance

of Alexander,' are perched aloft on the 'tree of all seeds.' The prowess of this mythical bird is one of the story subjects in the world's lore—how it flies with elephants in its grasp, or carries off the strong hero Rustem; or in the Talmud: 'An egg once dropped out of the nest of a bird called Bar-Yuchnei, which deluged *sixty cities* and swept away *three hundred cedars*. The question therefore arose: "Does the bird generally throw out its eggs?" Rav Ashi answered: "No; that was a rotten one"' (Hershon). Already, in the clay writings, there is the mighty Zu bird, on a high mountain, alone.

In Egypt it was the golden egg hatched by the goose that produced the mundane matter; and the bird is only framed on a scale suitable, or even perhaps hardly adequate, to the work it has to do! Nearly all systems giving an account of a genesis agree in this, that as the second or third step there was produced from chaos a gigantic egg. The Egyptian, Phœnician, Assyrian, Hindu, and Greek systems are here at one. 'From Desire and Vapour proceeded primitive Matter. It was a muddy water—black, icy, profound—encompassing insensible monsters, incoherent parts of forms to be born. Then Matter condensed and became an egg. It broke; one half formed the earth, the other half the firmament. The sun, the moon, the winds, and the clouds appeared, and a crash of thunder awakened the sentient animals.' The Orphic fragments and Aristophanes preserve a Greek tradition to the same effect. When only Chaos and Night existed—

'At length, in the dreary chaotical closet
Of Erebus old, was a privy deposit;
By night the primæval in secresy laid
A Mystical Egg, that in silence and shade
Was brooded and hatched.'—*The Birds*.

And we may complete the scheme from quite another source—the northern Kalevala:—

‘From one half of the egg, the lower,
Grows the nether vault of Terra;
From the upper half remaining
Grows the upper vault of Heaven.’

The Hindu code of Manu gives an account entirely similar. The Eternal, willing to create, made by thought the humid principle and in it deposited matter. This primitive germ floated on the waters; soon the mass condensed itself into an egg, brilliant as gold and full of light. From this mysterious envelope was born Brahma, father of all spirits. At the end of a year the egg opened of itself; the upper half formed the sky, the lower part the earth, the air is between, with the eight regions and the reservoir of waters. Another account says the egg contained the five elements, and was enclosed in seven envelopes, like the wrappings of an onion; the seven envelopes falling off became the seven heavens, and the seven worlds of the Brahman world scheme.

M. Dognée, in *Les Symboles Antiques, l'Œuf*, has traced the symbolic use of the egg as it appears on the monuments or in literature, but only in a footnote is the suspended ostrich egg mentioned, as it is found in Temple, Tomb, Church, and Mosque.

‘In Japan, in the Pagoda of Miaco,’ he says, ‘upon a large square altar is placed a bull of massive gold on a block of rock; the animal is ornamented by a rich collar, and pushes with its horns an egg floating in the water contained in a cavity of the rock. To explain this image, the following is told by the Priests. At the time of chaos, before the creation, the world was concealed and inert in an egg which floated on the surface of the waters. . . The divine bull image of

creative force broke the egg by a stroke of its horns, and from the egg issued the terrestrial globe.’

The earth itself was considered by several mediæval writers to be oviform. Bede likened the world to an egg, as did also Edrisi the Arabian geographer: it half floated in water in an upright position, Jerusalem being at the top.

The egg symbol was especially made use of by the Egyptians: it is shown on the monuments and referred to in the texts as a symbol of the embryo creation (Ra in the Egg). Wilkinson, writing of the ostrich, says ‘even its eggs were required for some ornamental or religious use, and these with the plumes formed part of the tribute imposed by the Egyptians on the conquered countries where it abounded. The purpose to which the eggs were applied is unknown; but we may infer, from a religious prejudice in their favour among the Christians of Egypt, that some superstition was connected with them, and that they were suspended in the temples of the ancient Egyptians, as they still are in the churches of the Copts. . . . They consider them the emblems of watchfulness: sometimes they use them with a different view; the rope of their lamps is passed through an ostrich egg shell in order to prevent rats coming down and drinking the oil, as we were assured by the monks of Dayr Antonios.’

When the primordial egg was a part of the cosmological legend of a people, it is easy to see that not only was any egg a symbol of the origin of life, but an especially large egg would be preserved as sacred, and suspended in the temple an image of the world floating in the void: and there does seem something inherently mysterious in the structure and perfect form of a very large egg. One, for instance, in the Museum of Natural History is some thirteen

inches long, thirty inches in girth; it will hold two and one-third gallons.

Although there is no incontrovertible evidence of eggs having been suspended in Egyptian temples, of Greece we have the clearest contemporary testimony by Pausanias. 'And hard by (Boonita in Laconia) is the temple of Hilaira and Phœbe, who, the writer of the Cyprian poems says, were the daughters of Apollo; and their priestesses are maidens, called also Leucippides as well as the goddesses. One of their statues was touched up by a priestess of the goddesses, who, with an art not unknown in our days, put a new face on the old statue; but a dream prevented her treating the other statue in the same way. *Here is hung up an egg, fastened to the roof by fillets; they say it is the egg which Leda is said to have laid*' (iii. 16). The story of Leda and the parallel one of Latona are but distorted cosmic myths of Night and Chaos, from which is formed the egg mundane.

The egg, firmly and widely accepted as a symbol of life and creation, becomes an emblem of resurrection and new life; and thus the widely-spread observance of Easter egg customs, and the association with the tomb. 'Marble eggs are said to have been discovered in some early martyr's tomb at Rome' (Butler). 'Admitted to the funeral ceremonies, the egg was also deposited in the tomb with the cinders of the dead. Eggs have been found in many tombs at Nola' (Dognée). In the British Museum are six large ostrich eggs, decorated with carvings in low relief, of Archaic style, which were found in one tomb at Vulci, in Etruria. Perrot, who illustrates them, says they are of Phœnician origin. The holes—one large in the centre with three smaller ones round it, and one hole only at the other end—show that they were certainly mounted, probably with

a metal cap, for suspension, like the modern ones in the East.

Mr Dennis (Etruria) says: 'The eggs have holes in them as if for suspension, and bring to mind the great roc's egg of the Arabian Nights; or rather, recall the fact of ostrich eggs being suspended in mosques at the present day. Imitations of ostrich eggs in terra cotta (as though the supply of real ones was not sufficient) have been found in the tombs of Vulci. Hens' eggs are often found not only in Etruria but in Greece and her colonies, and are sometimes enclosed in vases. Many museums of Italy contain specimens of this singular sepulchral furniture, probably in this case an emblem of resurrection.' Instances of all these are in the British Museum. In a tomb at Bologna an Etruscan was exhumed with an egg in his hands (Sir F. Burton).

Of the Latin races Dognée says 'it was by following the empire of the same idea that they affected the ovoid form for funeral vases,' an example of the reaction of thought and custom on design which, if true here, is certainly as well founded in the case of Egyptian funeral vases, some of which in the British museum are of the form of an egg: and on the tables of offerings shown in the reliefs there are almost invariably egg-shaped vessels.

Maurice, in his 'Antiquities of India,' says of a serpent coiled around an egg used as a symbol on coins: 'The Phœnecians adorned the lofty temples of Tyre with this emblem, which was there seen suspended on high, and encircling in its genial folds the mundane egg or symbol of the universe.' This is entirely parallel on the one side to the account of Pausanias quoted above of the egg suspended in memory of that laid by Leda, and on the other to Chaldian myth. Not only was it a symbol of the earth's first birth to the Phœnicians, but to the Assyrians as well. 'The Chaos-

serpent,' says Mr Boscawen, 'lay coiled round the earth until slain by Merodach the Lord of Light.' The serpent is represented with the body of a woman, and 'it was this Queen of Chaos who ruled while the earth lay like the cosmic egg in her coils, in the time when as yet none of the gods had come forth.'

Of its early votive use by the Semites, Mr Robertson Smith tells us that the people of Mecca annually visited a tree where they suspended weapons, garments, and ostrich eggs.

In the British Museum is an ovoid stone from Chaldea which has an inscription of Sargon I. (to whose name is attached the earliest date in monumental history) dedicating it to the temple of Sippara: it is of beautiful veined alabaster, about three inches long, and pierced for suspension. Schliemann found several eggs of oriental alabaster at 'Troy' and Mycenæ which he considered *ex votos*.

There is a beautiful specimen in the Museum at Athens of an ostrich egg, the surface of which is decorated with swimming dolphins of blue vitreous material probably of Egyptian origin. This was found in a tomb at Mycenæ, and would seem to be earlier than the sixth century; it is pierced for a cord, and is an object of singular beauty (*see next page*). In the South Kensington Museum there are two or three ostrich eggs for hanging, elaborately carved, of Persian work; and many of porcelain, from the churches of Anatolia, painted with cherubim.

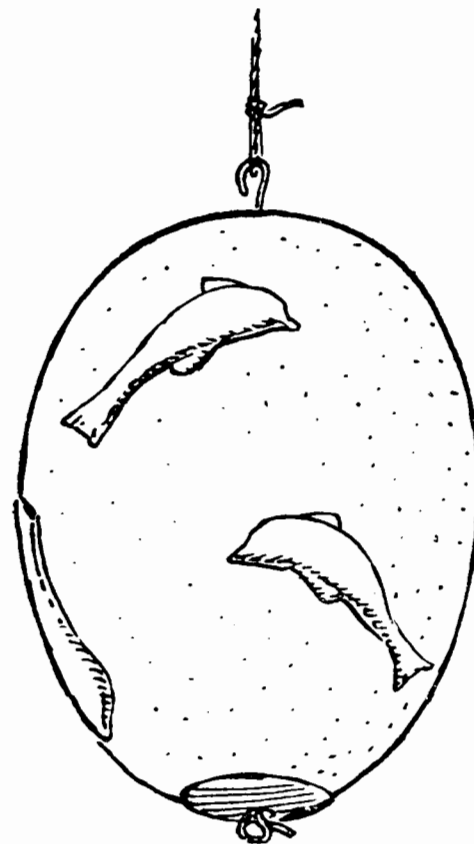
It is curious to notice how the hanging lamp affects the form of the egg with which it is so often associated in the East. The Jewish seven-light brass synagogue lamp of several pieces hanging one to the other, has at the bottom an egg-shaped pendant. Many of the Italian renaissance lamps are ovoid: and a very splendid enamelled Russian lamp in South

Kensington Museum is of the same form itself, with a pendant separate piece the size and shape of an ostrich egg. It may be that the shape is æsthetically the best for suspension, the form of every drop of water as it falls. It is sufficient for us that the egg

was used as an architectural symbol of the origin of the world, suspended from the sky-like dome, record of a genesis, an emblem of the mystery of life, and a hope of resurrection.

Now when we recall the egg which Aladdin desired to suspend from the dome of his palace, we can feel with him that even that room with the twenty-four jewelled lattices was not perfect without it. The mistake was to ask the Genie for the roc's egg itself, and not to be content

with its symbol. The adventure is the third and last peril of Aladdin, and the termination of the story: when the younger brother of the African Magician, disguised as the Holy Woman Fatima, is taken to the



palace by the Princess Badroulboudour:—‘My good mother,’ said the princess, ‘I am delighted to enjoy the company of such a holy woman as yourself, who will by your presence bring down blessings upon the whole palace. And now I mention this palace, pray tell me what you think of it. But before I show you the other apartments, tell me how you like this hall?’

‘Pardon my freedom of speech, gracious lady,’ replied the dissembling magician. ‘My opinion, if it can be of any value, is that if the egg of a roc were suspended from the centre of the dome, this hall would not have its equal in any of the four quarters of the world, and your palace would be the wonder of the whole universe.’

‘My good mother,’ returned the princess, ‘tell me what kind of bird a roc is, and where the egg of one could be found?’ ‘Princess,’ answered the feigned Fatima, ‘the roc is a bird of prodigious size which inhabits the summit of Mount Caucasus; and the architect who designed your palace can procure you a roc’s egg.’

Aladdin returned late on the same evening, when the false Fatima had taken leave of the princess, and had retired to the apartment allotted to her. As soon as he entered the palace, he went to the apartment of the princess. He saluted and embraced her; but she seemed to him to receive him with less than her usual welcome. ‘I do not find you, my princess, in your usual good spirits,’ said Aladdin. ‘Has anything happened during my absence that has displeased or vexed you? Do not, in the name of heaven, conceal it from me; for there is nothing in my power that I will not do to attempt to dispel it.’ ‘I have been disturbed by a mere trifle,’ replied the princess, ‘and it really gives me so little anxiety that I did not suppose that my discomposure would be so apparent in my face and

manner that you could have perceived it. But since you have observed some alteration in me, which I by no means intended, I will not conceal the cause, inconsiderable as it is. I thought as you did yourself,’ the princess continued, ‘that our palace was the most superb, the most beautiful, and the most completely decorated of all the buildings in the whole world. I will tell you, however, what has come into my head on thoroughly examining the hall of the twenty-four windows. Do not you think with me that if a roc’s egg were suspended from the centre of the dome, it would greatly improve the effect?’ ‘It is enough, my princess,’ replied Aladdin, ‘that you think the absence of a roc’s egg a defect. You shall find by the diligence with which I am going to repair this omission, that there is nothing I will not do for the love of you.’

Aladdin instantly left the princess and went up to the hall of the twenty-four windows; and then taking out of his bosom the lamp, which he always carried about with him since the distress he had undergone from the neglect of that precaution, he rubbed it to summon the genie, who immediately appeared before him. ‘O Genie!’ said Aladdin, ‘a roc’s egg should be suspended from the centre of the dome in order to make it perfect; I command you in the name of the lamp which I hold to get this defect rectified.’

Aladdin had scarcely pronounced these words when the genie uttered so loud and dreadful a scream that the very room shook, and Aladdin could not refrain from trembling violently. ‘How thou wretch!’ exclaimed the genie in a voice that would have made the most courageous man shake with dread, ‘is it not enough that I and my companions have done everything thou hast chosen to command? Wouldst thou repay our services by such unparalleled ingratitude as

to command me to bring thee my master, and hang
 him up in the midst of this vaulted dome? For this
 crime thou dost deserve to be instantly torn to
 atoms, and thy wife and palace should per-
 ish with thee. But thou art fortunate
 that the request did not originate
 with thee, and that the command
 is not in any way thine.'

THE END

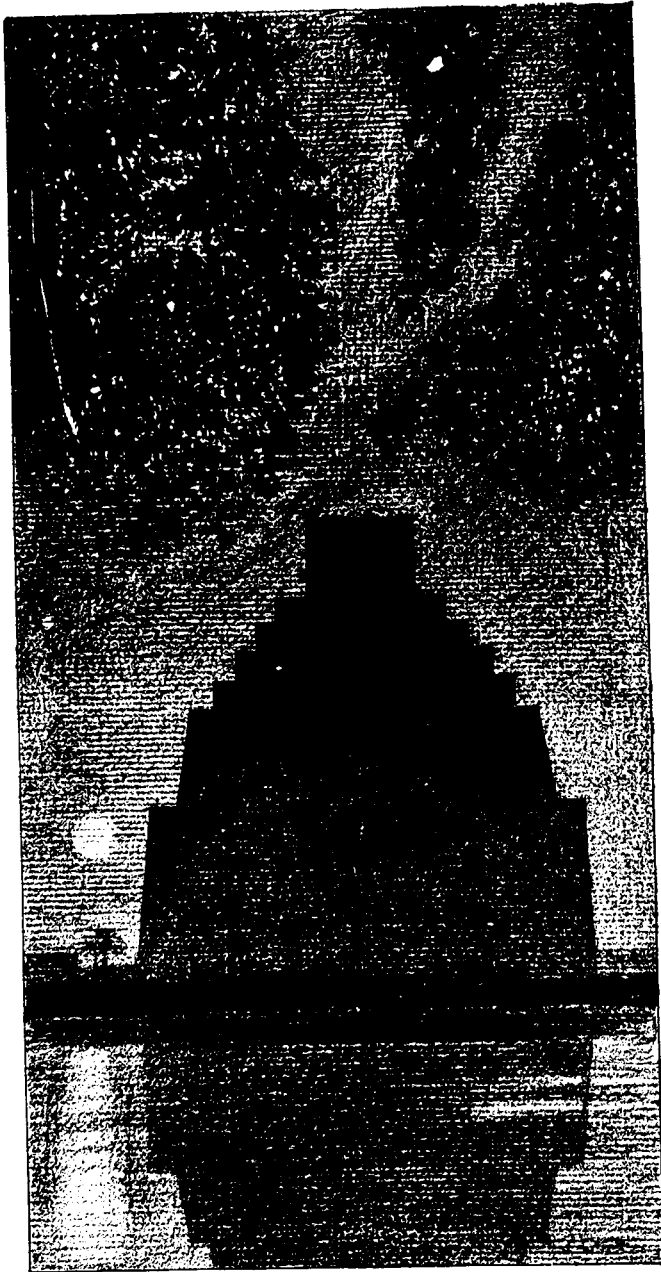
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LETHABY'S PRINCIPAL SOURCES

Architecture, Mysticism and Myth is an extraordinary book which the contemporary reader may occasionally find difficult to read as the style is not only affected by Lethaby's fascination with symbolism, but the text is dense with his combing of often strange and, to us, completely unfamiliar sources to which he only cursorily alludes. In its organisation and in the marshalling of so much disparate material it is, however, for a young architect without any formal academic training an outstanding achievement, but forty years later and from the standpoint of the international scholar that he had then become he wrote of this first book:

"My little book was very insufficient and in many ways feeble, second rate and second-hand authorities were mixed up with true sources and the whole was uncritical and inexpert. . . . The main thesis that the development of building practise and ideas of world structure acted and reacted on one another I still believe to be sound and much of the material brought together to give substance to the proposition is not without its value."*

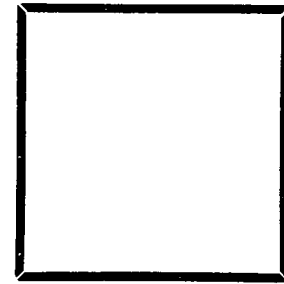
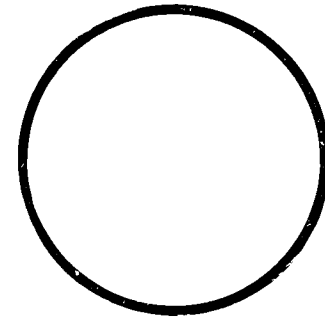
But this mature retrospection does not detract from the fascination of the work both for us as a document of the 1890s with its rag-bag of fact and fiction and its

* Lethaby, W. R., *Architecture, Nature and Magic* Duckworth, London: 1956, p. 15.



ARCHITECTURE
MYSTICISM AND
MYTH. *By W. R. Lethaby*
with illustrations by the Author

*'Are there symbols which may be called constant; proper to
all races, all societies, and all countries?'* CÉSAR DALY.



1975

GEORGE BRAZILLER *New York*

*'And upon peters grete, of Jasper longe
I sawgh a temple of glas ifounded stronge.'*—CHAUCER.
Fine Arts Lib.

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INTRODUCTION by GODFREY RUBENS

"A prophet however much he may appear to be in opposition to his age, yet in a peculiar way represents that time. He is the antidote, or balance, the complement, and his is the voice which awakes all those who are ready to be like minded. If he is wholly successful, and his teaching is absorbed, it may afterwards hardly be understood how anyone might have believed otherwise. The flashing inspiration becomes a common place. It is the prophet's aim to be thus absorbed".¹

This quotation is from an essay by William Lethaby on John Ruskin, but he could with more justice have been writing of himself. The influence of Ruskin and William Morris on the radical development of late nineteenth-century design and architecture is now better understood and it has become increasingly arguable that Lethaby's work had equal significance. In the world of architectural thought he occupied a most unusual position, influencing architects, educationalists, historians and others by his articles in architectural and building journals, by his books, by his teaching and by his presence on many bodies connected with design and architecture.

When at the beginning of this century English architecture returned to eclecticism and various forms of classicism were revived, Lethaby's ideas, at least as far